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WHY SIT YE HERE IDLE?

This significant and stirring inquiry was addressed by the prophet to his countrymen, when threatened with war, famine, and pestilence, as the punishment of their great sins. He seems to *see* the sorest calamities just ready to overwhelm them; he drops the thread of prophecy, and cries out, Why do we sit still, till destruction overtake us? Let us flee into the defenced cities, and seek a refuge from threatening evils.

Fellow-citizen, fellow-sinner, whoever you may be, pardon me, if I seem abruptly to address this inquiry to you. A case so urgent, and so deeply involving your dearest interests, admits of no delay.—

Methinks I see *you* threatened with war, famine, and pestilence; a disastrous war with God, a famine of the bread of life, and a pestilence that kills the soul. And I cannot refrain from asking, in all the urgency of an affectionate solitude for your eternal well-being, Why sit you here idle?

Do you say, I have nothing to do? A *sinner* nothing to do, who has a life of sin to repent of, a world of sin within him to subdue, another world of sin about him to reclaim, and a hell of endless sin and misery yawning before him to escape; who has not yet entered upon the work of securing the pardon of his sins and the salvation of his soul; who has yet to decide between death and life, between heaven and hell! Surely you have enough to do: you have a work assigned you as the business of life. Life was given you for no other purpose than to do it.

And it is a great and difficult work.—For a sinner to become a Christian, a child of hell an heir of heaven, is a work of such unequalled magnitude, and such extreme difficulty, that you are exhorted in the Scriptures to strive and agonize for its accomplishment, to take the kingdom of

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heaven by violence; and you are told, that so far from being able to do it at any moment without much effort, it is impossible for you to do it by your unaided exertions; so that if, by sitting idle, you weary out the patience of God, and forfeit his help, you will never be able to accomplish it, and will lose your soul. Why then will you sit idle?

Not because God interposes any obstacles to your salvation. Look, I pray you, at what God hath sacrificed in the person of the Father, and suffered in the person of the Son, and done in the person of the Spirit, for your salvation. Look at all the declarations of his word, and the arrangements of his providence, and the provisions of his grace, and tell me what more he could have done for you than he has already done. And have you the hardihood, have you the injustice and ingratitude, in the face of all this, to charge him with unwillingness that you should be saved? Why then sit idle?

Not because others will do this great work for you. God desires to have it done, with a strength of feeling and an ardor of love for your soul, which you

cannot conceive, which words cannot express, which can be set forth only by such signs of infinite significance as the incarnation of his Son, the bloody agonies of the garden, the atoning sacrifice on the cross, and the gift of the Holy Spirit.—But it is *you* who must repent and believe, who must trust in the merits of Christ, and cherish the influences of the Spirit.—Pious parents and Christian friends can pray for you, and labor with you, and weep over you, but they cannot shed the tear of penitence, nor offer the prayer of the publican in your stead, nor in your stead become reconciled to God; no, nor in your stead suffer the wrath of God and the pains of hell for ever. *Your own eye must see*, and *your own ear hear*, and *your own heart feel*. *Yourself* must repent and believe, and love and act in *the most vigorous exercise of your best powers and affections*. You must give an account of *yourself* before God. And your own soul must be saved or lost, ineffably happy or unutterably miserable forever? Why, then sit idle?

Not because it is a matter of so small importance whether the work is done or

not, that it may safely be left to take care of itself. Sit idle, and so far from doing the work, or its being done for you, you are doing the opposite with your might. Sit idle, and your feet are swift in the road to hell. Do this work, and you have done all that chiefly concerns you. Neglect it, and you have done nothing that is of any value. You have wasted your time, perverted your talents, thrown away *yourself* at one fearful cast for ever. And what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose *himself?* Why then sit idle?

Not because you have any too much time for doing this work. God gives us time for this purpose, and for no other.—Every man feels, when he lies upon his dying bed, that the whole of life wisely devoted, was not a moment too much to make his calling and election sure. Yet you have spent ten, twenty, thirty, forty years, without entering upon the great business of life. Have you any more time to throw away--you, who never had too much, and yet have wasted one-half, two-thirds, perhaps nearly all of it, perhaps

all but the very last day or hour? Do you still linger?

Think not that other beings and other things will stand still and wait for your action. Every thing else will move on, whether you do or not. Life will flee apace, and death will hurry on. Death never stands still: he has already begun his work on you, he will not stop till he has finished it, and he will finish it far sooner than you expect. Time will roll away, and eternity draw near. Time never stands still: it rolls, it flies away, like the vapor; like the lightning flash, it appears for an instant, and then darts away, to be seen no more. God never sits still. Give thanks to him that he does *not* fail to cause the sun to rise and the rain to descend. He will carry forward the wheels of nature, and the arrangements of his providence, and the designs of his grace, and all his steadfast purposes. Christ never sits still. What if he had remained in the bosom of the Father, or should now suspend his work of intercession? He will build up his kingdom and gather in his elect, and bring you to

his judgment-seat, and show your naked soul to your own eye and to the assembled universe, and pronounce upon you the irreversible sentence of blessing or cursing, and send you to heaven or hell, where you will sit idle no more: where you will do your appointed work, and do it well, and keep doing it without cessation, and without end; for so do all in the unseen world. Heaven is never idle. Saints an angels serve God day and night in his temple.—They never need and never wish to rest in their seraphic work. And it is the perfection of their state, that the period will never arrive when they will be inactive — They will work on, and sing on, and shine on for ever. And when they have outlived their own highest conception of a happy *eternity*, it will be the perfection of their bliss that it is *yet to be et* *al.*

Hell is never still. Devil . d lost men too, have no rest day nor . ht, no rest in sinning, no rest in suffering, no rest in sinking deeper and deeper still in remorse and despair and shame and everlasting contempt:

"Burning continually, yet unconsumed;
For ever wasting, yet enduring still;
Dying perpetually, yet never dead:
Where there are groans that never end, and sighs
That always sigh, and tears that ever weep,
And ever fall, but not in Mercy's sight."

No; they never sit idle in hell, and they never will; and that is the keenest pang in their sufferings. When they have groaned out a period longer than their utmost imagination of an *eternity*, it will be the bitterest ingredient in their cup—the deep still lower than the lowest deep in hell—that it is *yet to be eternal.*

Have you yet to choose between these two worlds? for in one or the other you must dwell, and must work for ever. Why then, O why sit idle? How will you answer the question to your own understanding, to your conscience, to your duty, to your interest, to the world, and to God? Sit idle, when property and reputation, and health and life are at stake, sit unmoved before the lion's paw, at the cannon's mouth, at the edge of the precipice, on the brink of the cataract, and I will hold my peace. But I cannot keep silence and see you sit idle in a world of probation, in a Christian land, on the eve of the judgment, on the brink of eternity, on the dividing line between an eternal heaven and an eternal hell.

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